Women in the Middle Ages

A Pathfinder to Sources
in Beatley Library, Simmons College
Boston, MA

Scope/Content

This pathfinder provides a guide to resources at Beatley library that will assist in research into the lives of women during the middle ages. The medieval era is generally considered to stretch from 450 CE - 1500 CE, and to include regions from the Middle East to Scandinavia. This is a vast span of time and space, and these centuries saw the formation of modern Europe, the birth of Islam, the rise of Christianity, and the first European exploration of America, and women played a role in all of these events. It is impossible to truly represent all of the aspects of this time period, but this pathfinder may give you a good start.

Subject Headings

Women -- History -- Middle Ages, 500-1500
Women -- History -- Middle Ages
Women in literature -- History
Women and literature -- Europe -- History -- To 1500.
Literature, Medieval -- Women authors -- History and criticism.
Library of Congress Classification Numbers

History -- General (Medieval): D101-D203
History -- Britain (Medieval): DA129-260
Religion -- Christianity (Medieval): BR160-275
Women -- Feminism: HQ1101-2030
Literature -- General (Medieval): PN661-694
Literature -- French (Medieval): PQ151-221
Literature -- English (Anglo-Saxon & Medieval): PR171-369; PR 1490-2165
Literature -- English (Women Authors): PR111-116
Literature -- German (Old Norse): PT7101-7338

Introductory Sources


The first half of the book is comprised of essays on different regions and time periods. The essays on "Medieval Britain" and "France: The Middle Ages to 1700" are especially relevant, and the more general essays on Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Scandinavia, and the Arab Middle East are also useful.


Contains essays on women and early Christianity, art, marriage, employment, war, Islam, witchcraft, and monarchy, as well as biographical pieces on Hypatia of Alexandria, Galla Placidia, Anna Comnena, Hildegard of Bingen, Margery Ke,pe, and Christine de Pizan.


General Online Sources
Internet Medieval Sourcebook (Fordham University).

Enormous collection of primary sources from the medieval era, either in the public domain or by permission from their translators. Most sections are organized by time period and region, but there is also a section on Gender & Sexuality. Resources about women will be scattered throughout the other sections.

The Labyrinth (Georgetown University).

A collection of online resources on a variety of topics in medieval history. Check out the sections on Women and Gender & Sexuality, but other topics might yield interesting information too.

NetSERF (Catholic University of America).

A collection of online sources organized by topic. Also contains a list of blogs, organizations, and mailing lists.

Medievalists.Net.

A blog which posts about new articles, publications, news items, and research about the middle ages. All posts are tagged. Check out the tag for Women's Studies.

Online Databases

*Simmons log on is required to access

Project MUSE

A scholarly research database for the Social Sciences. Searches for "medieval women" and "women" + "middle ages" turns up many hits, of articles as well as reviews of some of the books included in this pathfinder.

MLA Bibliography

Database sponsored by the Modern Language Association which provides citations to scholarly articles in the fields of literature, language studies, and cultural studies.

Historical Abstracts

This database, run by EBSCOhost, can help you find citations of scholarly articles on more historical topics. Furthermore it is focused on world history excluding US history, which makes it even more appropriate for researching the middle ages.

Arts & Humanities Citation Index

A truly extensive database with articles from a broad range of fields.
Regional Sources

CALL NUMBER: REF PR111 .B57 1990

CALL NUMBER: HQ1147 .G7 F44 1987

CALL NUMBER: HQ1147 .G7 J68 1996

CALL NUMBER: HQ1147 .N8 J63 1995

CALL NUMBER: HQ1147 .G7 L496 1995

CALL NUMBER: HW1147 .E6 P55 2003

CALL NUMBER: REF PO149 .F73 1991

Contains entries on Christine de Pizan, Marguerite de Navarre, Marie de France, and female troubadours. Each entry contains a very useful bibliography of other sources on each author/topic.

Women’s Roles in Medieval Society

CALL NUMBER: HQ1143 .F76 1990

CALL NUMBER: PN682 .W6 C66 1999

CALL NUMBER: HQ1143 .W63 1988

CALL NUMBER: HQ1147 .G7 H36 2007


Biographies of "all women rulers, de facto rulers, and constitutional monarchs, living or deceased, of the world's kingdoms, islands, empires, nations, and tribes since the
beginning of recorded history." A little dated ut very interesting, containing entries on pretty obscure female figures from the Middle Ages and Late Antiquity.

CALL NUMBER: REF B105 .W6 K47 1989

CALL NUMBER: CB353 .C837 1996

CALL NUMBER: N8343 .M86 1975

CALL NUMBER: HQ1143 .V67 2005

CALL NUMBER: N8354 .P48

CALL NUMBER: HQ1143 .R35 2002

CALL NUMBER: DA247 .D42 Sp3 1999b

### Medieval Women and Religion

**Monastic Matrix: A Scholarly Resource for the Study of Women's Religious communities from 400 to 1600 CE (University of Southern California)**

Excellent resource containing profiles of medieval women's monastic communities, biographies, primary and secondary sources, bibliographies, and images.

CALL NUMBER: BX1656 .B45 1985

CALL NUMBER: BR253 .B96 1987


CALL NUMBER: PR1120 .M374 1992

Winston-Allen, Anne. (2004). *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and
Biographies of Medieval Women


**BOSTON UNIV.** CALL NUMBER: DL65 .B77 2007

This "biography" attempts to reconstruct the experiences of Gudrid Thorbjornardottir, the sister-in-law of Leif Eriksson, who traveled with him, her husband, and others to "Vinland" (most likely modern day Newfoundland) around the year 1000 AD.


**HARVARD UNIV.** CALL NUMBER: DA198.6 .C48 1992


CALL NUMBER: DA209 .E K45


**BOSTON UNIV.** CALL NUMBER: BX4700 .C4 L86 2006


**HARVARD UNIV.** CALL NUMBER: DA154.9 E84 S73 1993

One of the few biographies of the obscure tenth-century Anglo-Saxon queen Aethelflaed, daughter of Alfred the Great, king of Wessex and wife of Aethelred, ruler of Mercia. Following her husband’s death she ruled Mercia in his place for 15 years and fought off Danish attacks and rebuilt the city of Gloucester from Roman ruins.


**NORTHEASTERN UNIV.** CALL NUMBER: DA209 .E 2000


CALL NUMBER: DA231 .I83 W45 2005

Women in Medieval Literature

Primary Sources


CALL NUMBER: PR1912 .A2 W65 1992


CALL NUMBER: PR1508 .K36

Few of the poems included in this anthology feature women,
but it does contain a translation of "The Wife's Lament", a significant Old English exile poem from the perspective of the widow of a lord.


Secondary Sources


Literature by Medieval Women

Introductions and Anthologies


Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters (Columbia University). This is a large collection of translations of letters written by medieval women. The letters were translated by Dr. Joan Ferrante of Columbia and the website was developed by the Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning. Most of
these letters are available in print resources but here they are gathered together and are easily accessible. It also contains biographies of the women letter-writers.

**Important Female Writers**

**Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim (935-1002)**
CALL NUMBER: PA8340 .A25 B6 1986

**Anna Comnena (1083-1153)**
HARVARD UNIV. CALL NUMBER: DF605 .C55 2009

Anna Comnena was a Byzantine princess who nearly became empress. She wrote this history of her father, Alexius, when she was an old woman locked away for planning a coup to put her husband on the throne. She is considered to be the first female historian.

**Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)**
CALL NUMBER: BV5080 .H5413 1986

CALL NUMBER: BX4700 .H5 M33 2001

CALL NUMBER: BX4700 .H5 N48 1987


**Marie de France (12th century)**
CALL NUMBER: PQ1494 .L3 E5 1982

**Christine de Pizan (1363-1430)**
CALL NUMBER: PQ 1575 .Z5 C464 2003

CALL NUMBER: PQ1575 .L56 E5 1982

**Margery Kempe (1373-1438)**
